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Christian is the means of getting it in the most available and effective form. Is the man complete who is without that power? How can the man who lacks it count himself complete in this great age of Christian responsibility and

Christian ambition? Will he excuse himself by saying "No; it is true I have not enough power, but I have some power"? Will a man in the age of electricity be satisfied to live by the light of kerosene and candles?

## THE CHURCH OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB IN CHINA

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To those who have studied the development of the Jewish religion the term "The church of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" must seem an anomaly. Those worthy patriarchs had no "church." Their religious beliefs and forms of worship were primitive and elementary. To find the significance of the term, therefore, we should look, not to a period thousands of years before Christ, but to the present time; not to Palestine, but to the church being established by missionaries in China. There is danger that, instead of building the church of Christ, we may be building a church patterned after the early Hebrew patriarchs. How far this danger may be true of countries other than China the writer cannot state with authority. As certain conditions are true to missionary work in many lands, it may be that such a danger exists in other countries also. Here in China the problem is one worthy of serious attention.

Perhaps the main danger lies in the possibility that the Chinese Christians will accept the narratives in the first books of the Old Testament as an

adequate expression of the principles on which the Christian church should be built, and as of equal importance with the teachings of Jesus. Unless the Old Testament narratives are taught very carefully, so that they are rightly understood and correctly interpreted by the Chinese, they may cause the Chinese to study the teachings of Jesus with an entirely untrue perspective. His teachings may be discolored and distorted because of an entirely erroneous conception of the relative value of the stories of the Old Testament and of his teachings.

On the mission field the problems involved in teaching the Old Testament to the converts from non-Christian religions are far more serious than the problems involved in teaching the same material to people in a "Christian" land. For example, there is a greater danger in teaching the Chinese the narratives in the books of the Hexateuch than there is in teaching such narratives in America. In America the entire environment represents a plane of civilization thousands of years

removed from that represented in portions of the Old Testament. Any American who reads the narratives in the Hexateuch feels at once that a vast gulf separates him from those times. Institutions have changed. Thought-life has changed. Religion has changed. Elemental human instincts, including a hungering and thirsting after God, remain unchanged. So while we profit from seeing how men struggled for and achieved ideals, how men searched for and found God, we realize there is a vast difference between their environment and ours, between their ideals and ours. When we read or study the Old Testament narratives, we read or study them in the light of the ideals of Christ. In the light of those ideals we condemn or praise, we avoid or emulate. Our civilization, saturated as it is by a spirit due to an earnest desire on the part of many to follow Jesus' teachings, helps us to place a proper evaluation on the Old Testament. Our civilization is, without any question, our most easily understood, our most widely read, and our most valuable, commentary on the Old Testament. The effect is largely involuntary and unconscious, but it is very real.

Here in China the situation is radically different. The Chinese are "at home" among the stories of the patriarchs and the early narratives of the Old Testament, which portray to some extent their own present moral and religious development. The highest phase of the Jewish religion, that of the prophets, is entirely foreign to them. They must not only reach this stage but must pass through it before they approach even an early stage of Chris-

tianity. There is therefore nothing in their environment that makes them either consciously or unconsciously evaluate the Old Testament in the light of Jesus' teachings.

For this reason, in presenting and teaching the Bible to the Chinese the Christian church should be careful that the Chinese understand what the Bible is. The method the church has mainly used may be expressed as follows: "Here is the Bible, the inspired Word of God, the guide to salvation, the revealer of God and God's will. It is the Bread of Life. Feed on it and not only will your heart be satisfied but you will desire to feed others also."

All this the Bible is, without any question whatever. The fault is not in the Bible but in our method. The result of such a method is natural and inevitable. The Chinese take the Bible and "feed" on it. Many of them do not realize that the teachings of Jesus are the standard by which all parts of the Book are to be evaluated. They read Leviticus and Numbers expecting to find among the rocks and barren slopes of those books the same rich harvests that abound in the Gospels. (Many times have Chinese pupils stated in examination papers that there is no difference between the teachings expressed in Leviticus and Numbers, and the teachings of Jesus.) Not finding the expected nourishment, they attempt to turn stones into real food, and being unable to perform such a miracle, they hunger. If they had been told that there they should search for "locusts and wild honey" they might have eaten and been refreshed. They read the patriarchs and not having been

taught to compare them with Christ, are sometimes led astray. They read of ideals which are so similar to their own that they are often content to follow the line of least resistance and accept those ideals as the ideals of the Christian church and their own lives, failing to understand that Christ's ideals are immeasurably superior. It is human nature to follow the line of least resistance. When the Chinese have been led to believe that all parts of the Bible teach the same truths, that all parts are equally inspired, and that nothing of human lack of comprehension or lack of wisdom enters into any part of the Book, is it any wonder that they unconsciously adjust themselves to those parts of the Bible which are most in harmony with their own thought and their own civilization? More and more am I convinced that a great majority of the Chinese Christians are making but little effort to live up to the standards established by Christ. They are content to pattern their lives somewhat after the old Hebrew patriarchs.

Who is to blame for this? Are the Chinese? The Bible has been handed to them as the inspired Word of God and the infallible guide to salvation. How are they to know the comparative value of its various books? If they expect to find in the Hexateuch exactly the same spiritual values they find in the Gospels, the inevitable result will be that they will fail to accord to Christ and his teachings the supreme place, and will put undue emphasis on the lives and deeds of those less worthy than Christ to be our pattern.

While the general result is usually expressed in low endeavor and satis-

faction with low achievements, occasionally the danger reveals itself in more acute forms, as was recently true in one section of China where the disastrous effects of the present interminable civil strife have been felt most keenly. Thousands of bandits calling themselves "Southerners," but only loosely allied with the real Southerners, terrorized the people. Band after band levied assessments of rice, money, or guns. When one band had passed, another came and demanded more. Enemies of Christians used this opportunity to wreak their vengeance. There was no official able to cope with the situation. Then it was that many Christians began to organize armed bands with the preachers as their leaders, and using the name of the church they proposed as a church to defend themselves from such aggression. The inevitable result would have been armed conflict with the bandits. It was almost in vain that the teachings of Jesus were presented to them in a passionate plea not to follow such a course. Most of them could see no conflict between the course they proposed to follow and the ideals Jesus followed. It was only when the preachers were threatened with strict disciplinary measures, and when the Christians were threatened with a course that would have deprived them of what little protection the church could give, that the movement was overcome.

At that time in a district conference one of the preachers took as his text the incident where Abraham armed his followers and rescued Lot from his captors. He claimed that the Christians should follow Abraham's example and organize societies for their own

protection. This doubtless was the secret of the whole movement. The Chinese were taking Abraham as their ideal and not Jesus Christ. Such incidents show the danger there is that the church in China will become the church of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, rather than the church of Christ.

There are, perhaps, three main causes of this danger. The first is a certain degree of thoughtlessness in the training of Chinese preachers. As an illustration of this, consider the course of study which one of the Protestant churches requires each candidate for admission into a conference and to elders' orders to complete. The Biblical material required in the course is arranged as follows:

<i>Entrance:</i>	Genesis, Exodus Matthew, Mark, Luke
<i>First Year:</i>	Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy Acts, I and II Peter
<i>Second Year:</i>	Joshua, I and II Samuel John, Romans
<i>Third Year:</i>	I and II Kings, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes I Corinthians to Colossians inclusive
<i>Fourth Year:</i>	Isaiah, Daniel, Job I and II Timothy, Hebrews

What principle determined the books chosen and those omitted from the course? What principle determined the grouping of the material? Why are so many books, worth comparatively little from the standpoint of practical Christianity, given such prominence, and other books, with a real, vital message for the present as well as for the past, omitted altogether? It appears after careful consideration that the order and

grouping and choice of material were determined not by any pedagogical principles but simply by the order in which the books are to be found in the Bible, with several exceptions. A start was made with the first books in both the Old and New Testaments. When five years were filled, there was no room for most of the books in the last half of the Old Testament or for the last few in the New. One or two books toward the end of each were included and the rest were simply left out.

What would be the natural effect of such a course on the thought of the preachers? Would it not inevitably tend to make them place undue emphasis on parts of the Old Testament? If the Synoptic Gospels can be completed satisfactorily in one year, but the Pentateuch can only be completed in two, what must be the relative value of the Pentateuch and the Gospels? When of the first twelve books in the Old Testament ten are included in the course, and of all the "Prophets" only Isaiah and Daniel are included, what will the preachers naturally conclude regarding the relative value of the Prophets? Yet this course has for a number of years been the course prescribed for all preachers in that denomination who wish to enter conference and be ordained. Is it any wonder the Chinese preachers learn to place undue emphasis on the Old Testament narratives?

A second source of the danger is the unpedagogical nature of religious education in some mission schools. The curricula in the schools vary in the different parts of China, so that what is true of one is not necessarily true of

another. In the schools in one section of China the children were required to study the following course:

- Fifth Grade:* Luke  
*Sixth Grade:* Acts  
*Seventh Grade:* Abraham, Isaac, Jacob,  
 Joseph, Moses, Samuel,  
 and David  
*Eighth Grade:* First term, Genesis, chapters  
 1 to 25  
 Second term, John

Of all the Old Testament characters, only those mentioned above were included. No mention was made of the many other equally inspired and inspiring leaders and prophets. Then, to cap the climax, half of the last year was given to a detailed study of Genesis, chapters 1 to 25, with no textbook other than the Bible. Altogether apart from the advisability of forcing children in grade schools to search among the records of the moral degradation of an ancient race for the "jewels" of truth concealed there, arises the question, What must the students naturally think when so much time is given to a study of the Patriarchs and material such as is found in the first part of Genesis, and when the Prophets are entirely omitted from the course?

In the light of such conditions, is it any wonder that the Chinese do not have any conception of the relative value of different parts of the Bible? Is it strange that they place undue emphasis on the lives of the patriarchs and neglect the teachings of the prophets? Is it any wonder they have no conception of the growth of Christianity? When the simplest rules of religious pedagogy are violated so fla-

grantly, it is not strange that the church intended to be the church of Christ is in danger of being patterned after the patriarchs instead.

A third source of the danger, and a source even more important than either of the two already mentioned, is a lack of suitable literature to help the Chinese in their study of the Bible. Most of the Christian literature at present available in Chinese is either apologetic or homiletic. There is very little of an expository or exegetical kind. There are very few commentaries to which preachers may go for help.

Scarce as is suitable literature to aid preachers in their Bible study, there is still less literature prepared in simple, easy form for church members, and there is almost nothing for children of grammar-school age or for teachers of such children. For years the children in the mission schools in one part of China studied books such as Luke, John, Acts, and Genesis, without any textbook at all other than the Bible.

With so little literature to guide the Chinese preachers and students and church members in their study of the Bible, it is not strange if they misunderstand what they read. To focus their attention on Christ as the supreme Ideal, the whole Bible must be understood aright. The Hebrew patriarchs reached only the foot of the Mount of Vision. The road to the summit must be marked carefully so that weary pilgrims will not be tempted to end their journey before the summit has been attained. Until the Chinese are provided with an abundance of carefully prepared Bible-study literature, many of them will be content to dwell with

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the foot of the Mount, not knowing the way to the summit.

The missionaries should not be blamed too harshly for this lack of suitable literature. It is doubtful if the tasks of any Christian workers have been heavier. Burdened far beyond their strength, often expected to do work that can only be accomplished satisfactorily by several men, confronted by the appalling ignorance and superstition of the non-Christian masses, it can easily be understood how little time and energy were left for some things even as essential as adequate exegetical literature. It is gratifying that the need for such literature is so commonly

recognized among all the missionaries that at present a determined effort is being made to remedy the situation. Well-organized committees are preparing literature for children of grade-school age. Realizing that an adequate literature cannot be produced by those already burdened with other tasks, missionary boards are setting aside capable men for the work. There is no question but that the next few years will see the preparation of many new books for the Chinese church. It is to be hoped that these will help the Chinese in their evaluation of the various parts of the Bible so that Christ and not the old Hebrew patriarchs will really be the ideal of the Chinese church.